

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 520

RC 016 072

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TITLE Educational Needs in Northwest Schools.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, Oreg.
PUB DATE Jan 87
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Characteristics; Cultural Awareness; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Innovation; *Educational Needs; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Needs; High Risk Students; Models; *Needs Assessment; *Program Development; Program Evaluation; Regional Laboratories; Regional Programs; Relevance (Education); Research and Development; Rural Schools; School Community Relationship; School Support; Staff Development; Technology

IDENTIFIERS *Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory; *United States (Northwest)

ABSTRACT

This needs assessment identified six educational needs and issues of schools in the Northwest region, prioritized Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) areas of emphasis, evaluated research/development strategies to address these needs and priorities, and applied assessment results to NWREL program planning activities. Assessment information came from client follow-up surveys, requests for NWREL services, NWREL advisory committee input, a local education agency survey, a school improvement organization survey, and state-level school improvement agency planning meetings. Identified needs included: (1) intervention/prevention models for students at risk of school failure due to substance abuse, handicap, language, ethnicity, economic status, delinquency or other factors; (2) models for structuring school programs to better serve students, prepare them for technological change, and integrate basic skills with life skills, vocational skills, reasoning skills; (3) closer linkages between teacher education institutions and public school systems to better prepare and upgrade teachers; (4) methods to promote public awareness and local support for schools; (5) identification of characteristics of effective school administrators and development of training programs; and (6) identification and dissemination of promising educational practices among small, rural schools. Needs in NWREL priority areas included partnerships between schools and businesses/human resource agencies, teacher evaluation, professional development, school-based management, and technological awareness. (LFL)

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THE Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

PROGRAM REPORT

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN NORTHWEST SCHOOLS

By

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For

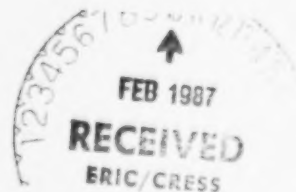
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January 1987

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Executive Summary

I. Introduction

The regional educational laboratories use research and development strategies to address issues and concerns faced by teachers, administrators and school improvement organizations. During the past year, several parallel activities have been conducted to gain insight into the nature and incidence of these educational needs in the Northwest region, which is composed of 1-1/2 million students attending over 4000 schools staffed by more than 90,000 teachers. These schools are served by approximately 200 school improvement organizations in the region. The information in this report is derived from six major sources:

1. Client Followup Surveys: Consumers of NWREL products and services were surveyed to determine their satisfaction and identify issues.
2. Needs Identification Logs: The nature of requests for NWREL services from educators was tabulated.
3. Advisory Committee Input: NWREL convenes eight advisory committees and a policy board at least once each year to review program activities and offer suggestions.
4. Local Education Agency Survey: A survey was conducted of teachers and school administrators in the region to identify trends and the need for assistance.
5. School Improvement Organization (SIO) Survey: School improvement organizations--state education agencies, educational service districts, professional associations, institutions of higher education--were surveyed on the importance of identified needs.
6. State-Level School Improvement Agency Planning Meetings: The major school improvement organizations in each state were invited to participate in statewide planning meetings to review assessment results and discuss educational priorities.

II. Findings

A. Educational Needs and Issues of the Region

When the various needs identified from the six sources of evidence are aggregated, several priorities emerge:

1. At Risk Youth--alternative models for the prevention and/or intervention on behalf of students at risk of being unsuccessful in school due to substance abuse, handicap, language, ethnicity, economic status, delinquency or other factors.

2. Redesigning School Programs and Curriculum--alternative models for structuring school programs to better serve students, prepare them for technological change, integrate basic skills with life skills, vocational skills, reasoning skills.
3. Teacher Preparation, Recruitment and Induction--establishing closer linkages between teacher education institutions and the public school system to better prepare and upgrade teachers.
4. Public Awareness and Support for Schools--methods for establishing a stable base of resource and a common set of values for schools by the local community.
5. Administrative Leadership--the identification of desirable characteristics of effective school administrators and development of training programs.
6. Rural Schooling--identification, development and dissemination of promising educational practices among small, rural schools.

B. Priorities Within NWREL's Areas of Emphasis

Needs were articulated in priority areas established by the NWREL Board of Directors.

1. Cultural Understanding and Equity. No particularly new or different issues were identified. Rather, it reconfirmed that the educational system has not yet adequately dealt with the similarities and differences among peoples of the world.
2. Education Involving Business and Human Resource Agencies. The responses clearly indicate a rising value for partnerships, both those which serve to better prepare students for the changing work of the future and those which bring all sectors together to intervene.
3. Evaluation and Assessment. The trends seem to be away from traditional emphasis on program evaluation and toward teacher evaluation, the use of evaluation and assessment information and techniques for planning improvements.
4. Professional Development. The field's view of professional development is beginning to mature. It is a high priority to Northwest educators and means more than "teacher workshops."
5. School Improvement. Beyond NWREL's Onward to Excellence program, school assistance is needed related to school-based management and the self study process. Effective schooling for alternative settings (e.g., rural, Native American,) continues to be of concern.
6. Technology. Educators in the field continue to have a limited a vision of technology. Continued awareness, dissemination and training is needed if technology is to be used effectively.

C. R&D Strategies to Address These Needs

Educators in the region see a blend of R&D strategies as being appropriate. They value cooperative efforts with other agencies, as well as direct linkages with schools. Finally, they emphasize NWREL's role of educational leadership: (1) as a catalyst to bring agencies and ideas together, (2) as an objective, neutral party and (3) as a source of new ideas and information.

III. Implications for Future Direction

The implications of the needs assessment findings for NWREL's program planning activities are fourfold:

1. How appropriate are the number and diversity of existing areas of emphasis? The adoption of several priority areas enables the Laboratory to maintain a pool of information and expertise for responding to a diversity of practitioner needs. Large scale R&D efforts and local services complement each other well.
2. Are there additional priorities which might be considered as areas of emphasis? The needs assessment findings identify several emerging issues which NWREL could address--teacher and administrator training and induction; school restructuring at-risk students; enhancing public support for education; and rural education.
3. Is the current mix of R&D service strategies viewed as appropriate? Northwest educators expect the Laboratory to maintain a relatively even proportion of research, development, dissemination and service. NWREL is most highly respected for information, ideas and opportunity for interchange among educators. Work with and through other school improvement organizations is viewed as an appropriate method of conducting R&D in the region, but direct linkages with local educational agencies remains highly valued by the field.
4. What are the appropriate priorities for NWREL work within each area of emphasis? Northwest educators were concerned about new topics on the cutting edge, and also fundamental issues with which NWREL should continue to deal. There is a reconfirmation from the field that products and services should be delivered with sufficient intensity, consistency, and continuity to affect substantial improvements in educational practice.

I. Introduction

Regional educational laboratories play an active role in linking the needs of schools to R&D solutions. This role requires a balance of both proactive and responsive work on emerging issues which can be addressed through research, development, dissemination and service. Proactive efforts evolve out of current research and development work conducted regionally and nationally by laboratories, centers, universities and the profession at large. Proactive efforts hold a vision of the potentials for schools now and in the future.

The wellsprings of the responsive work of regional educational laboratories are the needs of schools in the region. Research and development strategies are used to address issues and concerns faced by teachers, administrators and school improvement organizations. During the past year, several parallel activities have been conducted to gain insight into the nature and incidence of these educational needs. Some needs assessment methods have sought information about the immediate concerns of schools. Other methods provide a forecast of the needs of schools in the future. Together, these needs assessment approaches outline the potential for educational research and development in the region.

The Northwest region is composed of one-and-a-half million students attending over 4000 schools staffed by more than 90,000 teachers. These schools are served by approximately 200 school improvement organizations in the region. A regional constituency of this breadth and magnitude encompasses a wide range of needs competing for limited resources. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory faces the challenge of determining which of these needs can best be addressed through research and development strategies, combined with the shared resources, expertise and initiatives of school improvement organizations in the region. This report summarizes the needs and concerns of educators throughout the Northwest region. It also looks at the expectations which schools hold for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and other school improvement organizations. The information in this report is derived from six major sources:

1. Client Followup Surveys: Consumers of NWREL products and services most likely have a predisposition to continue a relationship with NWREL as long as those products and services are associated with their needs and interests. That is, quality service leads to long-term client relationships. Upon completion of contracted work, clients are surveyed to determine their satisfaction with the work and to identify issues which NWREL should prepare to address in the future. Ninety-two client agencies were mailed followup surveys, with a 60 percent return rate. Their opinions are included in this report.
2. Needs Identification Logs: A second source of information is drawn from direct requests from educators to clarify needs and develop resolution plans for problems they have identified and are attempting

to solve. A tabulation of the nature of these requests provides clues as to both the needs of schools and educators' perceptions of NWREL's potential to address those needs. One hundred twenty-five needs identification logs were analyzed as part of the needs assessment.

3. Advisory Committee Input: Another source of information concerning needs and opportunities in the region comes from the guidance of program, strand and special advisory committees. NWREL convenes eight advisory committees and a policy board at least once each year to review program activities and offer suggestions. Their advice affords NWREL information about educational needs and R&D strategies for their resolution.
4. Local Education Agency Survey: A fourth source of information was sought through a survey of teachers and school administrators in the region. The open-ended questionnaire asked about trends and the need for assistance from outside agencies to help schools with each of the six areas of emphasis adopted by NWREL. In addition, school personnel were asked to describe current and emerging needs of greatest concern.

All 909 school district administrators in the five states were surveyed along with a random sample of 568 school building principals and 568 building representatives of certified staff. Efforts were made to sample school board chairpersons, but the response rate was not sufficient to report. The rates of return for superintendents, principals and teachers were 23 percent, 21 percent and 13 percent, respectively. The response rate by state varied within two percent of the original sampling distribution.

5. School Improvement Organization (SIO) Survey: School districts rely upon a variety of agencies to assist them in addressing their educational needs. State departments of education, educational service districts, professional associations, institutions of higher education, as well as regional educational laboratories, to name a few, all serve as school improvement organizations. One hundred seventy-five school improvement organizations were surveyed in the region with a 22 percent response rate. The results of the LEA survey were shared with these agencies. They were asked to indicate the importance of these needs, the action their agency is taking and the activities NWREL could undertake with or through them to better serve schools.
6. State-Level School Improvement Agency Planning Meetings: The major school improvement organizations in each state were also invited to participate in state-wide planning meetings to review the LEA needs assessment results. These meetings provided a forum for the discussion of educational priorities within each state and the sharing of ideas for addressing these needs. This interaction enables NWREL to focus on R&D strategies which complement the capacity of the various SIOs (school improvement organizations) in NWREL's Northwest service region (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington).

II. Findings

The results of the needs assessment are organized into three sections. The first section describes the concerns of educators in the region without specific regard to the mission or areas of emphasis adopted by NWREL. This set of needs covers the broadest range of categories, but provides insight as to the areas of emphasis which could potentially emerge.

The second section describes the needs and issues of educators within each of the six areas of emphasis adopted by the NWREL Board of Directors. As part of NWREL policy (201-Program Policy), these areas of emphasis are annually reviewed by the Board to establish priority future directions for NWREL long-range planning. The needs assessment findings provide both a basis for decision as to whether existing programmatic emphases in each respective area should be continued, as well as an elaboration of the specific needs to be addressed and prospective R&D strategies for their resolution within each area.

The third section focuses on the desirability of using various combinations of R&D strategies to address the educational needs of the region. This allows the Board of Directors to examine the question of an appropriate balance of work, not only among research, development, dissemination and service, but also between direct linkages with local educational agencies on the one hand and cooperative ventures with and through school improvement organizations on the other. Findings in this section explore the perceptions of Northwest educators regarding "service mix."

A. Educational Needs and Issues of the Region

Needs in this category were articulated by educators in direct reference to improvement efforts they were undertaking, and without any reference to NWREL's mission or areas of emphasis. Clearly some needs here are within the purview of NWREL's mission, while others may not be.

A review of the needs identification service logs identified two distinctly new topics which did not neatly fit into the existing areas of emphasis. The first topic was that of at risk children and youth—students who are at risk of being unsuccessful in school because of social, economic, cultural, health, disability or other constraints. Requests for assistance were made in the areas of special education, corrections education and prevention programs. Educators requested information about alternative model programs, training resources and collaborative arrangements among agencies. NWREL is currently working in this area, primarily within the Education Involving Business and Human Resource Agencies Strand where cooperative ventures planned among education and human resource agencies which generally serve at risk youth are being studied and assisted. In addition, a regional conference on at risk youth will be held in March 1987.

The second topic focused on reasoning and thinking skills. Requests were made for definitional information, alternative models for teaching reasoning skills, ways to infuse these skills into the curriculum and

methods for their evaluation. While clearly not an area of emphasis per se, the higher order thinking/reasoning skill topic is receiving attention by NWREL in the Evaluation and Assessment area, as well as through OERI Task V work.

Thus, the two needs emerging through requests from the field are not new to NWREL. These are topics which have been consciously included as part of NWREL's work in the region. NWREL's concern for these areas has emerged concurrently with those of educators in the field.

A review of followup surveys completed by NWREL clients provides another source of evidence about regional needs. Respondents were asked to indicate "What issues affecting schools do you believe NWREL should address in the future?" Again, topics outside the existing areas of emphasis included both at risk children (e.g., substance abuse, children at risk, attendance, discipline, handicapped, positive self esteem building), which accounted for one-fifth of the comments, and thinking skills, which accounted for eight percent of the comments. In addition, public awareness and support for schools, including funding issues, were noted by eight percent of the respondents. The issue of decentralization of decision making was also mentioned. These organizational issues faced by schools have not been directly addressed by NWREL, but may have implications for work with both policymakers and school communities.

NWREL's major advisory committees are generally organized around existing areas of emphasis. As such, they predominantly provide direction and focus within a particular area of work. However, there are additional advisory groups which do not correspond directly to areas of emphasis, such as the urban superintendents group and the rural education advisory committee. Therefore, NWREL's advisory committee structure provides for input both within and beyond the adopted areas of emphasis.

A review of the minutes from NWREL's ten advisory groups provides insight into several areas of need which are departures from or extensions of current work. Those needs which were identified by two or more advisory groups as being of concern to the region are listed below (not necessarily in order of priority):

- o Improve linkages between public school system (LEA/SEA) and teacher training institutions.
- o Redesign school programs to provide transferable skills, including communication, entrepreneurial and adapting to change, to more closely link to work and continuing education.
- o School administrator preparation, induction and leadership training, especially for rural areas. Trends toward decentralization of management in larger school districts.

- o Issues of teacher supply and demand, induction and turnover.
- o Alternatives for delivering teacher and administrator professional development.
- o Coordinate services for at risk youth.
- o Improve school linkages with the community to achieve a common vision.
- o Use of technology and other arrangements for design and delivery of instruction.
- o Develop useful databases to describe and respond to school needs, especially rural.
- o Economic impact on school funding in the Northwest.
- o Addressing the cultural and economic diversity of students, particularly in urban schools.

The results of the local education agency survey concerning educational priorities and trends for the future provides further elaboration of the foregoing needs. The most commonly mentioned regional priorities were, in order, a need to:

- o Develop an adequate funding base for schools.
- o Design, deliver and pay for staff development.
- o Adapt and develop curriculum to address changing values, socio-economic factors and requirements.
- o Deal with drug and alcohol abuse in the schools.
- o Implement effective teaching strategies in the classrooms.
- o Better plan, adapt and utilize school facilities in response to changing demographics.
- o Recruit, induct and retain qualified teachers, especially in rural areas and in technical/advanced subjects.
- o Adapt to changing enrollments, both dramatic increases and declines.
- o Strengthen mathematics within and throughout the curriculum.
- o Enhance student motivation toward learning.
- o Improve reading instruction within and throughout the curriculum.

The school staff members were also asked to describe the unique settings of their schools which create a special educational need or opportunity. The response of the school personnel provides a depiction of the predominant characteristics of schools in the Northwest. They most commonly characterized their schools as rural, isolated and culturally diverse, suffering from a depressed economy and poor community. They also mentioned the small size of the school, the economy in transition, and the high mobility of the community population. School personnel characterized the need for exposure to urban settings. Finally, they saw their school-community holding high academic expectations.

In addition to these rural characteristics, the Northwest region has a distinctive urban element. Approximately one in four students attend school in the ten urban districts whose superintendents serve on the urban superintendents group. These districts see their unique characteristics as serving increasingly diverse student populations with burgeoning needs for unique services and a declining resource base as central cities struggle to regain economic vitality.

These are not needs in and of themselves, but rather they characterize the most common environments in which schools must successfully function and survive in the Northwest.

The results of the LEA survey were also analyzed on the basis of school size and rurality. The smallest schools and largest schools were both most concerned about inadequate school funding as a first priority and staff development as a second priority. Indeed, throughout the needs assessment, the perceptions of school personnel differed very little on the basis of school size. Responses from school personnel were also compared on the urban-rural continuum. Again, the groups tended to share common concerns about education. Urban schools tended to stress their cultural diversity while rural schools emphasize their isolation.

The survey of school improvement organizations serves to corroborate the needs expressed by local education agency personnel. School improvement agency representatives were asked to indicate for the top five LEA needs whether or not each was of high priority and whether they intended to assist schools with the need. Nearly two thirds (65%) agreed that the development of an adequate funding base for schools was a high priority which the SIOs intended to address. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents had similar feelings about staff development for school staff. Less than half (46%) viewed curriculum development as a priority issue to be addressed by school improvement organizations. They had similar feelings (49%) about substance abuse problems in the schools. About half (54%) of the SIOs responding to the survey felt that the implementation of effective teaching practices in classrooms was a priority which they intended to address. Few agencies indicated that these areas were not a high priority, but rather felt that they were not in a position to adequately deal with the need.

When NWREL discussed these needs during the state-level planning meetings in the five Northwest states, the school improvement organization representatives talked about the needs of schools and of their own agencies to deal with several issues (not in priority order):

- o Development of models for teacher preparation, induction and testing for certification.
- o Identification and training in the qualities of administrative leadership, supervision and guidance.
- o Development of prevention programs for at risk youth (early childhood, substance abuse, drop outs, outreach and parenting).
- o Development of models for designing practical policies and assessing their impact on schools.

When the various needs identified from the six sources of evidence are aggregated, a pattern emerges of several priorities and trends faced by Northwest schools:

1. At Risk Youth--alternative models for the prevention and/or intervention on behalf of students at risk of being unsuccessful in school due to substance abuse, handicap, language, ethnicity, economic status, delinquency or other factors. This priority is student-oriented, defining the need in terms of a particular segment of the school population which is unsuccessful.
2. Redesigning School Programs and Curriculum--alternative models for structuring school programs to better serve students, prepare them for technological change, integrate basic skills with life skills, vocational skills, reasoning skills and continuing education, and adapting curriculum to changing student demographics, community needs and values. This is more than an issue of curriculum articulation, but rather a more fundamental questioning of the traditional school program structure and its adequacy for preparing children for the future. This area is also concerned with the use of technology and organizational arrangements for the design and delivery of instruction.
3. Teacher Preparation, Recruitment and Induction--establishing closer linkages between teacher education institutions and the public school system to better prepare and upgrade teachers for various school settings and instructional responsibilities. This area deals with issues of supply and demand, teacher turnover as well as the design of effective inservice delivery models and effective teaching strategies to ensure that classroom instruction is of high quality and continuity.

4. Public Awareness and Support for Schools--methods for establishing a stable base of resources and a common set of values for schools by the local community. This is more than a public relations issue, rather it is concerned with the ties between schools and their communities which are faced with social and economic deterioration. How is a common, optimistic vision established which holds promise for the future of schools and communities?
5. Administrative Leadership--the identification of desirable characteristics of effective school administrators and development of training programs which will enable administrators to successfully function in various school settings. Administrator supply and demand, recruitment and retention are as critical as that of teachers. This area involves issues of teacher supervision and guidance, the leadership structure of schools, monitoring the continuity of boards of trustees, dealing with community/school change, and using research/databases for educational decision making.
6. Rural Schooling--the identification, development and dissemination of promising educational practices among small, rural schools. This area relates to each of the preceding five needs as being of particular concern to rural, small and isolated schools and communities. Rural schools are concerned about their at risk youth and the lack of support or preventive services to address their needs. The fundamental structure and values of rural schools are being tested by the social and economic transition of rural communities. Teacher and administrator turnover is high because of poor preparation and the lack of staff development delivery systems.

The six areas identified through the needs assessment are both interrelated and associated with existing NWREL efforts. Each area represents a different facet of schooling in the Northwest--the needs of students, teachers, administrators, communities, programs and geographic settings.

B. Priorities Within NWREL's Areas of Emphasis

Needs in this category were articulated in response to the current priorities for NWREL activities in the region which have been set by the NWREL Board of Directors. Currently, the NWREL Board has adopted six areas of emphasis for focusing and organizing NWREL work:

1. Cultural Understanding and Equity. Situated on the Pacific Rim, the NWREL region contains a rich blend of cultural and linguistic groups. Educators in the Northwest and Pacific provide services to many children who come to school speaking languages other than English.

Special services are required to meet the needs of minority groups--including women. While the numbers of working women and

minorities continue to increase, women and minorities remain seriously underrepresented in courses that prepare students for occupations of the future, and they continue to have more limited career aspirations.

2. Education Involving Business and Human Resource Agencies. Schools are entering into new and creative relationships with the private sector--parents and citizens groups, chambers of commerce, associations of businesses and manufacturers, organized labor, individual businesses, youth-oriented programs and volunteer bureaus. Together, educational programs can be planned to increase economic development, productivity and literacy; retrain dislocated workers; provide vocational education and meet the needs of at risk youth. Similarly, human resource specialists must strengthen education in adult and juvenile corrections, rehabilitation and employment programs. Each partner is recognizing that if excellence is to be achieved, new alliances must be built and expertise shared.
3. Evaluation and Assessment. School improvement efforts demand the systematic measurement of student achievement, program effectiveness and teacher competence. Many schools are seeking alternatives for assessing affective, higher-order thinking and other skill areas.

The quality of the evaluation and assessment data available to decision makers is critical for guiding improvement efforts. Teachers rely on this information to diagnose student needs, plan and evaluate instruction and provide feedback to students and parents. Administrators use such data for resource planning, program analyses and accountability. Policy makers depend on reliable information regarding student characteristics and achievement, school and program practices, and uses of resources to set educational priorities and plan for improvement.

4. Professional Development. As schools respond to educational excellence initiatives, an opportunity exists to develop and expand effective professional development programs. Such programs will be enhanced by the growing knowledge bases on how adults learn, elements of effective inservice education and processes for change.

There are about 100,000 teachers employed in the NWREL region. Even more will be needed in the near future. Our teacher education programs face this demand while operating under economic constraints.

Professional development activities must be provided to help teachers keep pace with increasing course loads and changing curriculum.

5. School Improvement. School improvement is the process of applying the results of research and development to improve student performance--academic achievement, attitudes and behavior.

The synthesis of two decades of educational research has created a comprehensive picture of effective schooling practices and guidelines for their successful implementation.

There are nearly 5,000 schools in the region. Principals, teachers and other members of the educational community have formed teams to make significant improvements in the quality and climate of these schools.

6. Technology. Instructional and administrative uses of computers are increasing rapidly; curriculum integration of software and inservice training are required.

Advances in telecommunications, increased access to information, and video technologies offer new resources to educators. For instance, schools in rural, isolated areas can now use technology for distance education of both students and teachers. But technology is influencing what is being taught as well as how it is taught. The increasing use of technology in the home and the workplace requires that everyone be "technologically literate."

These areas of emphasis are neither mutually exclusive nor do they correspond directly to NWREL's programmatic structure. Rather, they reflect topical areas of concern to the region within which NWREL holds promise and expertise for accomplishing R&D efforts of value to Northwest schools.

The needs assessment provided information about trends, needs and issues of concern to Northwest educators within each area of emphasis. This information can provide a basis for expanding and extending work within each area.

1. Cultural Understanding and Equity

Representatives of local education agencies (LEAs) and school improvement organizations (SIOs) responded to survey questions concerning the cultural understanding and equity area of emphasis in various ways.

Local education agency representatives reported the importance of cultural understanding and gender equity in terms of various role groups. The gist of their responses emphasized the need for student, teacher, administrator, parent, and the community involvement at the level of awareness to understand the various issues involved. These issues were related to bias in communication, in textbooks, in testing, in language, and in other areas which affect learning. Much needs to be done in the area of

cultural and gender equity. However, most often awareness (of the bias issues) was cited as the key to progress.

Local education agencies also stated that various cultural minorities were of particular concern. Native Americans and other ethnic minorities were often mentioned. Student-teacher intercultural communication was cited as an area of concern along with the difficulty of recruiting minority and bilingual teaching staff.

The views of school improvement organizations expressed in the mailed surveys depart from those of the local education agencies. The results indicate that its respondents mainly valued individual student cultural exchange programs and new cultural programs focused on world events. These views were not consistent with the priorities of LEA respondents who were focused on the problems entailed in the job of instructing in a multi-cultural classroom.

The third set of respondents (SIOs) were surveyed in person in each of five states (Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Alaska and Washington). These respondents received a personalized explanation of the issues of awareness of biases related to cultural understanding and gender equity. The results of this third survey reflected a clearer understanding of LEA priorities. This group gave constructive directives concerning activities which NWREL might undertake to address the cultural understanding and gender equity area of emphasis.

Among the suggestions were the following:

- a. Help teachers learn the content of culture and equity issues and incorporate them into practice and curriculum for all students.
- b. Upgrade teacher preparation curriculum in cultural awareness and the means to address the issues in the classroom, involving certification requirements for cultural awareness.
- c. Help schools/states to compile a database on special populations.
- d. Familiarize older, urban teachers with Title IX and the cultures of Native Americans, Hispanics, and Southeast Asians.
- e. Develop resource materials for practicing teachers explaining how-to and what-to-do for cultural and language differences.

Client followup surveys also suggested topics of concern in the area of cultural understanding and equity. They included bilingual education, gender and race equity, multicultural education, foreign languages and evaluation of testing materials for bias.

Needs assessment information in the area of cultural understanding and equity did not reveal any particularly new or different issues. Rather, it reconfirmed that the educational system has not yet adequately dealt with the similarities and differences among peoples of the world. Furthermore, the results reveal vast differences in the perspectives of education in the region. Cultural understanding and equity is an area which must be renewed as an educational priority.

2. Education Involving Business and Human Resource Agencies

Local education agency (LEA) and school improvement organization (SIO) representatives were also questioned about the education involving business and human resource agencies area of emphasis.

Local education agency representatives reported their main priorities in terms of motivating and assisting all students to cope with real world (labor market) preparation as a part of their educational experience. Secondly, the LEA respondents sought partnerships of various types with the business community and human resources agencies in order to achieve these goals.

The responses of LEA representatives indicated that some of the school districts represented were engaged in productive partnerships with the business community and human resource agencies although funding limitations were noted.

Many of the LEA respondents reported being at the initiation phase and/or having little knowledge of how to promote their school districts as worthy partners.

School improvement organizations rated education involving business and human resources as a high priority and indicated an intention to address it. Their main suggestions for addressing this area focused on NWREL's sharing of successful extant models, case studies and skill building for partnership programs.

The personally administered SIO survey offered further constructive suggestions on activities to address the education involving business and human resources area of emphasis. These were as follows:

- a. Workshops to train school personnel to develop and hold long-term relationships with agencies.
- b. Assist cooperation between schools, JTPA, and community colleges.
- c. Assist schools to use business-school partnerships to deal with at-risk youth and other community-based education models.

- d. Improve critical thinking and specific job skills curriculum.
- e. Identify and acknowledge successful current programs and partnerships. Disseminate this information as case studies.

Client followup survey information included suggestions for redefining the role and content of vocational education. It was also suggested that NWREL look at high school student tracking and dual credit systems.

The responses in this area clearly indicate a rising value for partnerships, both those which serve to better prepare students for the changing work of the future and those which bring all sectors together to intervene in conditions which are producing rising numbers of at risk youth and concern for the economic development of communities.

3. Evaluation and Assessment

LEA and SIO representatives responded to questions concerning the evaluation and assessment area of emphasis.

Local education agencies' responses indicated that the main priorities were related to student and teacher evaluation and the instruments used to measure competency. Of particular concern to this group of respondents were state mandated student achievement testing and how this single indicator may distort education priorities when used to rank schools.

Local education agencies also cited the importance of accountability and ways to assess student cultural awareness.

Respondents to the school improvement organization survey ranked some evaluation and assessment priorities differently than did the LEAs. That is, the SIOs noted that the general improvement of student testing was a high priority; but, in general they did not rate state and local test matching as a high priority nor did they indicate strong intentions to address it. SIOs did, however, rank improvements in teacher evaluation as a high priority which they intended to address.

All of the school improvement organization field survey respondents rated the evaluation and assessment area concerns as high priorities. The majority of respondents reported that their organizations intended to assist school with this area of emphasis. This group made the following suggestions as to activities for NWREL to consider:

- a. Construct evaluation instruments to determine the degree of teacher evaluation effectiveness.

- b. Link teacher evaluation to staff development and program improvement.
- c. Assist schools to clarify the meaning of "evaluation" to bring improvement, reduce associated threat, and involve teachers in the process.
- d. Develop test item banks and training for their appropriate use.
- e. Perform additional research in the correlations of (1) staff development and (2) student testing to student achievement.

Advisory groups were most concerned with the use of data bases for problem analysis, tracking trends and assessing impact of programs. In addition, the issue of school profiling as a mechanism for planning school improvement is related to this area of emphasis.

Measurement issues were also identified through advisory committee and client input:

- o Higher order thinking skills
- o School/classroom climate
- o Student's self-concept
- o Attitude toward school and specific subject areas
- o Curriculum alignment
- o Quality of classroom instruction and management
- o Quality of leadership

The trends in this area seem to be away from traditional emphasis on program evaluation and toward teacher evaluation, the use of evaluation and assessment information and techniques for planning both schoolwide and classroom level improvements. An especially noteworthy trend is the interest in the use of various databases for planning and decision making. For example, the need was expressed for reliable information about teacher supply and demand in the region. Several respondents indicated a need for training and assistance for educators in the appropriate use of research, evaluation and assessment data in planning and decision making.

4. Professional Development

The fourth area of emphasis in the surveys was professional development. All three LEA groups rated this area as a high priority.

The respondents to the local education agencies' (LEAs) survey answered in general terms that staff development was their top priority. The specific content of workshops and or inservice programs was not often mentioned by respondents. When mention was made, such issues as effective teaching strategies, and teacher certification and renewal were cited. Still, the topics were not as specific as might have been expected for this area of emphasis.

Use of intermediate agency resources and alternative funding methods to assist and promote professional development activities were also highly ranked by local education agencies.

The respondents to the mail survey of SIOs reported that they wanted NWREL to act as a clearinghouse of information related to resources available for inservice. Also highly ranked by these respondents were new methods to improve staff development at local districts and improved access to research for them to use in planning their professional development assistance to schools.

The SIO group of respondents (participating in the field meetings) gave more specific suggestions for what should be done to address the priorities in the professional development area of emphasis. Among these suggestions were the following:

- a. Train school boards and administrators in better understanding and defining the need for staff development in specific areas, as well as how to assess professional development needs.
- b. Assist in increasing the productivity of staff during the introduction of new technology.
- c. Assist schools and school districts in gaining legislative and business support for staff development activities.
- d. Build models of professionals themselves implementing staff development. Field test these models and disseminate the findings.
- e. Train teachers to develop their own skills in professional decision making. Use peer coaching and other techniques as basis of this training.

Field service logs identified leadership development, teacher/principal selection and teacher induction as topics of interest. Client followup surveys cited the need for continued training in the basic skills (reading comprehension and writing), as well as research and development work on teacher certification and recruitment. Advisory committee recommendations focused on the development of more efficient service delivery strategies, such as consortia arrangements. They encouraged NWREL to work more with teacher education programs on issues of teacher testing, supply,

demand and turnover. School administrator preparation, shortage and turnover should also be considered. Finally, the group was concerned about teacher and administrator induction in different cultural and environmental contexts.

The field's view of professional development is beginning to mature. It's a high priority to Northwest educators and means more than "teacher workshops." The professional growth of educators from higher education throughout their careers is now part of the perspective. The supply and demand of competent personnel for our schools is at issue.

5. School Improvement

LEA and SIO representatives also responded to survey questions concerning the school improvement area of emphasis. Local education agency representatives reported their top priorities in this area. Essentially, these respondents were seeking ways and means to utilize administrators and teachers more effectively to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the schools. Often mentioned were techniques such as time and motion studies, cost/benefit analysis, and fiscal responsiveness indicators. These respondents want the most their education dollars can buy. LEA representatives were also concerned with providing the proper environment for student learning.

The great majority of respondents of the SIO mail survey also rated school improvement items as high priorities. Their top ranked suggestions for NWREL activities conducted with and through them were information dissemination (especially to smaller districts), technical assistance, and training in better use of time and funds.

The state planning discussions with SIOs yielded more specific suggestions. All of these respondents rated school improvement topics as high priorities. Over three-fourths stated that these priorities currently were not being completely met by SIOs. Among the suggestions of activities for NWREL were the following:

- a. Develop trackable indicators which show whether or not improvement efforts actually result in improvement.
- b. Assist in clarifying the role of the school board and the community and help increase communication between students, parents, teachers, administrators, the community and higher education.
- c. Develop and disseminate efficient models for profiling and self study.
- d. Conduct skills training in promoting school improvement through staff and school patrons.

- e. Disseminate research linking school improvement and student achievement.
- f. Promote an increased role of teachers in school-based management.

Needs identification service logs identified school improvement as the most frequently requested area for assistance. Beyond the Onward to Excellence program, requests were also related to school-based management and the self study process. Client followup surveys also identified effective schooling as an important topic. Classroom management, student attendance, homework, discipline, self esteem, and barriers between central office and school were also mentioned. Effective schooling for alternative settings (e.g., rural, Native American, and at risk students) continues to be of concern.

6. Technology

Responses to this NWREL area of emphasis were also received from local educators and school improvement organizations. These responses varied in a number of ways.

The local education survey respondents were preoccupied with uses of the computer. Their interests were in computer assisted instruction, administrative applications, teacher training in computer use and logistics of computer use. Also highly ranked was curriculum development for all types of technology including computers and selection of software and hardware.

Respondents to the mail survey for SIOs indicated that staff development utilizing computers was their top ranked priority in this area of emphasis. Computer assisted instruction for teachers and a technical assistance resource pool from which to draw were also of considerable interest.

School improvement organizations, participating in state planning discussions, gave many specific suggestions for the types of activities which NWREL might share with them to address the priorities in the technology area of emphasis. Among these suggestions were the following:

- a. Assist schools in looking at their instructional and curriculum needs first and then examine technology as a tool for addressing them.
- b. Develop a system of identifying effective computer assisted instruction software which requires critical thinking skills.
- c. Form consortia of rural and small schools to combine strengths including sharing teachers and equipment for upgrading curriculum and instruction via media networks.

- d. Train teachers and administrators in key areas of computer usage categories, e.g., word processing, analysis, career counseling, schedule designing, and individualized instruction, to both increase effective utilization and decrease fear of technology.
- e. Assist schools in broadening their awareness and use of "non-computer" technologies such as video interactive instruction, satellite telecommunications, and electronic mail. The notion of technical application for distance education was also mentioned.
- f. Assist school districts in identifying options for funding to enhance curriculum utilization of technology.

Needs identification service logs and client followup surveys indicate continued interest in the application of computers to specific curriculum areas, such as science, social studies and special education. The use of technology for management and administration also continues to be of interest, such as electronic communications and database development. Advisory groups dealt with the more fundamental question of how technological change impacts the school--what, who and how we teach.

The educators in the field do not appear to have as broad a vision of technology as does NWREL, other school improvement organizations, and NWREL's professional advisors. There is more to technology than microcomputers. On the otherhand, the priorities of school staff are a reminder that continued and sustained awareness, dissemination and training is needed if technology is to be used effectively at the local level over the years to come.

C. R&D Strategies to Address These Needs

"Regional education laboratories are a unique resource in America's educational system. Their mission is to connect the often separate educational interests of a region and the nation to improve educational practices for all."* Within the R&D framework, regional educational laboratories have an array of strategies which can be used to improve educational practices. For the past twenty years, federal expectations have changed frequently as to which strategies are most appropriate for regional laboratories to use, often placing heavy emphasis on one aspect to the near exclusion of others. Experience within the region, however, has demonstrated that a mix of R&D strategies is most desirable to NWREL's clients.

*McClure, Larry. The Regional Laboratory Connection: Improving Educational Practices through Systematic Research and Development. Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1977.

The various sources of data for the needs assessment provide a good deal of information about how Northwest educators view NWREL's role in school improvement and their expectations as to how research, development, dissemination and service strategies can best address future needs.

The client followup survey results provide a reasonable starting point. Clients currently value very highly the nature and quality of the work NWREL does. Their general expectation is more of the same, with emphasis given to followup. In response to specific questions, these clients value NWREL as a source of research/networking information and as a catalyst for stimulating dialogue. However, it must be remembered that the majority of these clientele received direct training and services, which they also rate highly and indicate interest in continuing. The survey of local educational agencies gives a better view of overall service mix. School personnel were asked to indicate what combination of R&D strategies NWREL should use to address the educational issues of schools in the region. The distribution of their responses was:

<u>Research</u> --analyzing new ideas and summarizing existing research about school improvement or other educational issues	21%
<u>Development</u> --designing materials, instructional strategies and programs to meet particular educational needs	23%
<u>Dissemination</u> --sharing educational research and information, sponsoring education conferences and facilitating networking among educators	29%
<u>Services</u> --training educational personnel and providing technical assistance and consulting services directly to schools	28%

The blend of R&D roles is only slightly skewed toward dissemination and service functions. Schools do view NWREL as being uniquely qualified to undertake a continuum of work from research through field service, and believe that it is appropriate and important to do so.

When asked what services, if any, schools would desire from NWREL in the future, survey responses were as follows:

1. Staff development/in-service training
2. Information/dissemination services
3. Research
4. Technical assistance

Schools do view NWREL as a source of leadership and information in the region. School improvement organizations view NWREL in a similar light. The concept of working with and through agencies is not new to the Northwest region. Again a balance of direct linkages to schools, as well as cooperative ventures with school improvement organizations to achieve mutually desirable goals, is the most reasonable and expected stance.

The school improvement organization feedback from the regional survey and state-level planning meetings called for NWREL to engage in several roles (not in order of rank):

1. Research. NWREL can provide a leadership role in identifying new ideas, testing the benefits of various approaches, developing master plans, studying policy issues, testing the rationales of alternative solutions, monitoring data bases for schools to address prospective questions, and generally asking "what if" questions for the region.
2. Development. NWREL can develop and test various models for collaboration, delivery of staff development, the reapplication of ideas to new settings and other institutional/organizational processes schools commonly encounter.
3. Dissemination. NWREL can maintain objective information about "what works" as a clearinghouse and routinely share this information with the field. It can maintain awareness of schools on what is available and what is new. It can conduct conferences to provide a forum for educators with common interests. A particular interest at state meetings was timely access to the latest R&D information from the network of regional laboratories and other national R&D performers.
4. Service. NWREL can provide training and provide an ongoing mechanism for followup to maintain the focus of schools. Technical services such as plans, critiques and policy analyses can best be done by NWREL as a concerned, but neutral party.

In carrying out all of these roles school improvement organizations stressed the unique capability of NWREL to act as a "neutral convenor," bringing together regional groups to share ideas and assisting key state and regional improvement efforts in better complementing one another.

How do educators in the region view NWREL's role? They have a high regard for the nature and quality of NWREL products and services. They see a blend of R&D strategies as being appropriate. They value cooperative efforts with and through other agencies as well as direct linkages with schools. Finally, they emphasize NWREL's role of educational leadership, (1) as a catalyst to bring agencies and ideas together, (2) as an objective, neutral party and (3) as a source of new ideas and information. They encourage NWREL to develop information and service delivery systems which provide for routine, ongoing followup.

III. Implications for Future Direction

Regional educational needs provide one source of information for planning the work of NWREL. Other sources of information include existing work, regional and national education initiatives and new information emerging from research by the profession. The implications of the needs assessment findings for NWREL's program planning activities are fourfold:

1. How appropriate are the number and diversity of existing areas of emphasis? The adoption of several priority areas, independent of but complementary to OERI expectations, enables the Laboratory to maintain a pool of information and expertise for responding to a diversity of practitioner needs. This diversity or hybrid vigor also allows NWREL to develop a varied resource base. Large scale R&D efforts and local services do complement each other very well.
2. Are there additional priorities which might be considered as areas of emphasis? The needs assessment findings do identify several emerging issues which NWREL could address. Some of these topics could be incorporated into one or more of the existing six areas. Teacher and administrator training and induction both could easily fall within the areas of professional development and school improvement. School restructuring issues and at risk student's equity may be too general in their impact to be considered as independent areas of emphasis, but most certainly should be part of NWREL's work. Enhancing public support for education and rural schooling are somewhat more narrow in scope, yet are sufficiently different from the existing six areas of emphasis, to justify consideration as priority areas, either separately or collectively.
3. Is the current mix of R&D service strategies viewed as appropriate? NWREL's work is very highly regarded. Northwest educators expect the laboratory to maintain a relatively even proportion of research, development, dissemination and service. NWREL is not viewed as exclusively being a research organization or exclusively being a field service agency. NWREL is most highly respected for information, ideas and opportunity for interchange among educators. Work with and through other school improvement organizations is viewed as an appropriate method of conducting R&D in the region, but direct linkages with local educational agencies remains highly valued by the field.
4. What are the appropriate priorities for NWREL work within each area of emphasis? The needs assessment findings provide an important reminder that good products and services do not necessarily have to be new products and services. Northwest educators were concerned about both new topics on the cutting edge, but also fundamental issues with which NWREL should continue to deal. There is a reconfirmation from the field that products and services should be delivered with sufficient intensity, consistency, and continuity to affect substantial improvements in educational practice. NWREL should continue to explore alternative methods of dissemination and service delivery directly to schools or through intermediary agencies which serve schools.